I used to walk to school with no shoes, and now I have so many shoes that I lose count.

- Francis Phiri

He has been deaf since birth, so his family is familiar with the culture and sign language, which helped Phiri ease into the transition.

Phiri is an American Sign Language Deaf Studies major, but he has his eye on a bachelor's degree in child development and education, in hopes of one day becoming a teacher like Lester.

ASOC adviser Renee Gonzales talked about the resilience and bravery Phiri shows on a day-to-day basis.

"It is a miracle that he has survived such hardship and that Frank Lester brought him here for a better life," Gonzales said.

"Francis is such a fighter. He has been blessed with a level of intelligence, determination, resilience and understanding that I think have helped him rise above many challenges."

Most college students have a difficult enough time trying to maintain good grades, let alone being deaf and in a new country.

Phiri's story is truly inspiring, and he hopes that by telling it others can learn and grow.

"I want to encourage and motivate everybody, including the black community," Phiri said.

"In order to be successful, you have to have patience, flexibility and motivation. I try to embody these things so I can break through and be successful."

Phiri hopes to transfer to the University of San Diego or a state school after he is done here at Ohlone College.

These days, when he recalls his impoverished childhood, he can scarcely believe how far he has come in such a short time.

"I used to walk to school with no shoes, and now I have so many shoes that I lose count," Phiri said.

"Sometimes I feel like this is a dream that I can't wake up from, when I think about where I came from to now."